



It Takes More Than A Village



Sheila Hodges

By Sheila Hodges

Regionalism – the synergy of progressive communities joining in unified action to attain exponentially more than could ever be accomplished singularly. A mouthful to be sure, but this is my definition of what makes regionalism something in which to believe.

Allow me to paint you a picture. When Hillary Clinton expressed her views on raising children in her book, *It Takes a Village*, she was expanding the family unit to include the whole village. The school teacher impacts the child, the volunteer, the business owner, the civil employee and the church. If this exchange process is positive, then the child has a better chance of living

up to his individual potential.

It is the same with our respective communities. If we agree to marry our actions to common goals without prejudice, we can build a stronger community for ourselves and a better future for our children and grandchildren.

Here is an example. Some of you have heard my talk on the "Wisdom of Oz." I think we can learn something about regionalism from this wonderful story.

Regionalism is not a study in geography, as in the Land of Oz. It is a philosophy, one adopted by people. In the Oz story, Dorothy finds herself all alone in a strange land. Like Dorothy, most communities grow to a point that they find themselves in need of resources. They may be ill-equipped to fund or locate these resources. I believe this is similar to being "alone in a strange land."

Because the inhabitants of this strange land were open, caring and giving Munchkins, they directed Dorothy to the Wizard. They were not concerned she would use up the Wizard or trash the yellow brick road or even pick the flowers. She needed direction and they gave it.

As we all know, Dorothy starts out on her journey and quickly adds the Scarecrow, the Tin Man and the Cowardly Lion to her team, combining talents to reach the same goal. No matter how hard the Wicked Witch of the West or her battalion of flying monkeys tries to defeat this motley group, they succeed, in large part because of their combined talents and their die-hard belief in one another.

Sometimes I see similarities to these Land of Oz villains when a community is trying to gain resources from federal or state governments. It takes every commu-

nity in Baldwin and Mobile counties to scream the message loud and clear: "We are a major economic engine for the state through our property taxes, lodging taxes, gas taxes and more."

Now if you are offended because you are a Mobilian, and I listed Baldwin first in the last paragraph, you ain't listening! Little things can get in the way of big things if you let them. DON'T!

Toto was a little dog. But he unmasked the charade of a small man who had his community believing he was a wizard. Believe in YOUR ability to make a difference in this Alabama coastal region.

Envision Coastal Alabama is on a journey, and we invite you to come along.

Sheila Hodges is president of Meyer Real Estate and represents Baldwin County as Envision co-chair.

SEEDS: Enriching Daphne Education Through A Grassroots Foundation

When you combine a coalition of impassioned education advocates with the goal of inspiring children to dream, you get a powerful vision – one with education as a pillar of growth and endless possibilities for the community. A grassroots foundation in Daphne is creating just such a vision and making it a reality.

SEEDS, Supporting Educational Enrichment in Daphne's Schools, is a non-profit, independent education foundation dedicated to enriching Daphne children's K-12 learning experiences and, in turn, the quality of life in the community. The foundation was established in late 2003 and already has developed support from key centers of strength within the Daphne education community, including Daphne City Council and Baldwin County Superintendent **Faron Hollinger EdD** with support from the public, private and parochial schools.

The group has held two breakfast roundtable discussions in an effort to

secure input from Daphne centers of influence and collectively determining what is good for the long-term growth of the city.

"It was amazing to learn how much all Daphne educators agree on long-range goals for our schools," said **Michele Rumpf** with the Mobile Area Chamber and a SEEDS volunteer. "Our vision is to enrich education opportunities for all Daphne school children."

Denise D'Oliveira, co-founder of SEEDS, agreed. "In my 15 years of civic and education involvement in Daphne, I have never been to a convening where I felt more of a sense of community. There is tremendous anticipation for what might happen if we can get all the schools together."

The SEEDS mission is to fund development for education enrichment resources and to be an advocate for school improvements. It is not intended to take the place of school boards or local school PTAs.

Rather, SEEDS is trying to work with these very groups and others to make additional resources available to students, teachers and parents.

"SEEDS is not a band-aid, quick-fix program," said **Ruth Seawell**, co-founder of SEEDS. "It is about strategic improvement, better planning and open dialogue. That is what it will take to keep our children, once educated, coming back to this community to work. We want to make education a driver for economic development and ultimately build a stronger Daphne."

SEEDS will hold a Walk-A-Thon for all Daphne schools on Nov. 20. The event, scheduled during education week, will raise money to fund teacher grants and will serve as a SEEDS membership drive. For more information or to receive a monthly e-mail update on SEEDS, contact Seawell at **625-4680** or rseawell@larsonmcgowin.com.

Over the next three years, SEEDS is committed to the research, design and funding of The Lyceum of Baldwin County. Intended to be a state-of-the-art community learning center, The Lyceum will include

- enrichment programs in the arts and foreign languages;
- a technology lab for extended-hours research and distance learning;
- an in-depth training center for teachers;
- educational support services such as tutorial programs and career exploration resources;
- traveling exhibits;
- a performing arts theatre;
- and a children's/community theatre program.

Transit Summit Planned for February 2005; Hundreds Expected to Attend

Coordinated public transportation is a vital component in employment rates, economic and workforce development and personal mobility. Baldwin and Mobile counties are bringing this topic to the forefront of regional issues through the 2005 Regional Public Transit Summit, a joint initiative between Envision Coastal Alabama, The Baldwin County Public Transit Coalition and The Wave Transit System, formerly known as Metro Transit.

Scheduled for Feb. 25, 2005, the summit will promote a broader definition of public transportation and inspire action to keep pace with impending area growth. Specifically, leaders are hoping to alert the public to the inadequate transportation infrastructure, create a vision for development of an effective public transportation system in lower Alabama, and encourage public officials to move forward on improved public transit.

"This area has two critical issues facing it – transportation and affordable housing, especially in Baldwin County," said **Phillip Norris PhD**, Envision Equity Team chair from Baldwin County and director of the University of South Alabama Baldwin County campus. "We have to



Task Force Members, (pictured from left to right) Tom Livers, Bob Williams, Deborah York Geiger, Connie Plemmons and Paula Dicks, work on plans for the February Summit.

think outside the box and take a regional look at where we go from here."

The summit program format will include panel discussions and speakers representing various cities throughout the U.S., who plan to share their transportation planning success stories.

Also included on the agenda is **Tom Sanchez PhD**, associate professor of urban

affairs and planning at Virginia Tech's Institute for Metropolitan Research. Sanchez, a noted transportation planning expert, will discuss the connection between public transit and employment.

"We are seeking to heighten awareness of transportation issues in a six-county area, including Mobile, Baldwin, Escambia, Clarke, Washington and Monroe

counties," said **Bob Williams**, general manager of The Wave Transit System, Envision Economy Team member and co-chair of the summit. "A strong transit system ultimately can help bring in new business for the entire Gulf region."

The Regional Public Transit Summit, an outgrowth of **Congressman Jo Bonner's** community summits held in 2003, will target elected officials, business leaders, human resource and employment professionals, infrastructure developers, social services, senior citizens, citizens with disabilities, chambers of commerce, the tourism industry and the voting public.

"A well-established and coordinated regional infrastructure, particularly transportation, is crucial if new industry is to be attracted to south Alabama," said Bonner. "I applaud Envision Coastal Alabama for organizing this summit and am hopeful that the discussions held will result in a greater level of investment in the First District of Alabama."

For more information or to register for the summit, contact **Kyle Greer** by calling 431-8621 or e-mail kyle@mobilechamber.com.

Community Organization Addressing the Drug Problem in Pleasure Island Public Schools

The Baldwin County Board of Education recently approved this year's school budget, which included \$50,000 for a pilot drug-testing program for Gulf Shores High School. The program is supported by Baldwin County Superintendent **Faron Hollinger EdD** and is expected to be implemented this spring.

Brought to the attention of county leaders in large part by Pleasure Island-based Holy Spirit Community Organization (HSCO), part of the Baldwin County's ACT-II organization of faith-based community groups working for community improvements, drug use and abuse by

Pleasure Island youth is extremely high. According to the Alabama State Department of Education's PRIDE Survey, Gulf Shores high schoolers reported that last year, 52 percent of 10th graders had used marijuana; 25 percent of the 2004 senior class had used cocaine; and overall drug use was 43 percent (excluding alcohol use).

"It has been truly surprising to learn how prevalent drug use is among middle- and high school-aged youth in this area," said **Dan Hanson**, community organizer and consultant for HSCO through Ecumenical Ministries in Fairhope. "It is further com-

pounded by widespread parental denial."

The **Rev. John Whitfield**, another Ecumenical Ministries mentor for HSCO, said, "Now that all those involved have moved away from the 'ostrich syndrome' and wiped the sand out of their eyes, they have gained some clarity. I truly believe there is a genuine concern regarding this problem. If this effort can save one child's life, it will have been more than worth it."

Drug testing in the school is only one part of the solution, explained **Stan Virden**, founder of HSCO and Envision Equity Team member. The group also is working toward better and more comprehensive counseling

for first-time violators and substantial community involvement and investment in post-school-hour activities.

"We have to establish supplemental education enrichment programs if we are going to engage our youth and distract them from self-destructive behavior," said Virden.

HSCO works for community change by implementing a "study, action and follow-through" model established by the Pacific Institute for Community Organizations. The main goal is public education – to create a movement that inspires change.

Smart Growth Conference Act II: A Huge Success

As follow-up to the March 25 Smart Growth for Coastal Alabama Conference, Envision helped sponsor a mini-conference at the Daphne Civic Center in July. Approximately 150 people attended to hear the latest efforts on Smart Growth initiatives in the region and generate ideas on how Coastal Alabama can sustain healthy growth moving forward. This second Smart Growth session served to take the big-picture ideas shared in the first conference and relate them on the local level.

Speakers included representatives from both Mobile and Baldwin counties, specifically:

- **George Crozier**, Dauphin Island Sea Lab, on how growth affects oceans and local watersheds;
- **Wendy Allen and Charlene Lee**, InterLink LLC, on a two-year summary of the Healthy Coastal Communities Initiative;
- **Margaret Pappas**, City of Mobile, on Smart Growth projects underway in Mobile; and
- **Jo Godfrey**, City of Orange Beach, on growth management along the coast and preservation of the natural environment.

A diverse group of regional stakeholders were represented at the conference, with attendees ranging from farmers, business leaders and realtors to developers, conservationists and elected officials and planners. After speaker presentations were complete, attendees spent the second half of the conference in small discussion groups based on their profession. Each group generated prioritized initiatives they would like to see implemented in the area.

"The most surprising thing for most attendees was not the diversity of groups, but the commonality of ideas," said Allen. "There is a sincere desire among these stakeholders to develop a path and processes that allow for strong regional growth while preserving our natural spaces, environment and quality of life."



More than 300 participants from Coastal Alabama attended the March 25 Smart Growth Conference. The follow-up mini conference drew 150 attendees.

Calvin Freeland, president of the Mobile County Farmers Federation, joined seven of his colleagues from Baldwin and Mobile counties at the conference. "The farming community was pleased to attend and have a voice," he said. "Farmers have been strong environmentalists for years. We implement best management practices

every day and welcome the opportunity to share these concepts with other smart growth advocates."

The continued goal of Smart Growth for Coastal Alabama and the sponsoring parties, like Envision, is to build a base of support for the issues, then bring that support forward to garner policy changes.

Smart Growth Conferenced Act II Sponsors

- Baldwin County Association of Realtors
- Baldwin County Homebuilders Association
- Eastern Shore Chamber of Commerce
- Envision Coastal Alabama
- Homebuilders Association of Metro Mobile
- InterLink LLC
- Mobile Area Association of Realtors
- Mobile Bay National Estuary Program

Town Hall Meeting to Strengthen Alabama Families Postponed

The Mobile County meeting that was part of the statewide initiative to improve the Alabama Health and Human Services System and was scheduled for Sept. 14 was postponed due to Hurricane Ivan. Sponsored by Envision Coastal Alabama, the meeting will be re-scheduled for clients from Mobile County agencies such as human resources, mental health, public health, workforce development, youth services and more.

Envision E-Teams Making Things Happen

Envision Coastal Alabama is lucky to have dedicated leaders from Mobile and Baldwin counties propelling its four pillars and related E-teams forward. Each of these E-teams – equity, education, economy and environment – recently met, and here is a recap of the latest entities.

Education Team

The Education Team hosted a focus group on Aug. 26 with Baldwin and Mobile County Superintendents **Faron Hollinger EDD**, **Harold Dodge EDD** and representatives from education foundations in both counties. Envision plans to serve as an umbrella organization moving forward, providing a consistent forum for education foundations from both counties to network, collaborate and communicate.

“It was an excellent meeting,” said **Anthony Kaiser**, education team co-chair from Baldwin County. “The spirit of cooperation was strong.”

Kaiser’s Mobile County counterpart, **Jill Zurfluh**, agreed. “I have great feelings about the potential for this area regarding education, especially now that we see what a strong working relationship the two counties’ superintendents already have.”



Newly appointed E-chairs installed at the Envision Annual Meeting are **David Yeager** and **Elizabeth Phillips**, Environment; **Frank Leatherbury** and **Mike Hofto**, Economy; **Jill Zurfluh** and **Anthony Kaiser**, Education. Not shown **Phillip Norris** and **Ron Martin**, Equity.

Equity Team

See “Transit Summit Planned for February 2005: Hundreds Expected to Attend.”

Economy Team

More than 50 members of the Economy Team assembled on Aug. 25 to receive updates on Smart Growth for Coastal Alabama, regional tourism, workforce development, economic development and constitutional reform. The team broke into small roundtable discussion groups to brainstorm ways of honing and prioritizing the E-team’s efforts.

“**Frank Leatherbury**, Economy co-chair from Baldwin County, and I were impressed with the group’s enthusiasm, active participation and creativity,” said Mobile County co-chair **Mike Hofto**. “This group has a true commitment to approaching economic issues from a regional perspective.”

Environment Team

The Environment Team met on Oct. 28, to review initiatives relevant to its four main team strategies. The status of current focus areas was updated through briefings from the Dauphin Island Sea Lab, **Bob Schaffer** of Alabama Citizens for

Constitutional Reform, **Wendy Allen** and **Charlene Lee** on smart growth and **Leevones Dubose**, Trinity Gardens neighborhood leader. Break-out session results identified several environmental priorities for coastal Alabama, including the possibility of starting a regional recycling program for both counties headed up by **Bob Haskins** of Keep Mobile Beautiful.

Keep Mobile Beautiful’s will host a “No Computer Should Go to Waste” event on Saturday, Nov. 13 at the Greater Gulf State Fairgrounds. Any brand computer (CPU), monitor (computer CRT), printer or peripheral (i.e., mouse, keyboards, etc.) will be accepted.

KMB is one of 20 communities across the U.S. to obtain a grant from Dell Inc. to conduct this one-day computer recycling collection event.



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